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NOTES

# Baobab can't stop the dance – or can they?

PIERRE OBENDRAUF THE GAZETTE
Orchestra Baobab saxophonist Issa Cissokho at the Spectrum.

## EDITOR OF DOWNBEAT BACK FOR MORE

### Inspired set list, telepathic interplay, reworked standards – Costello gives his all

Orchestra Baobab's 6 p.m. set at the Spectrum Thursday was as gripping as they come, full of Latin-tinged flavour, sweet melodies, driving percussion and onstage high jinks.

From the moment Barthelemy Attiso took his first solo on the second number, Sutukun, his fluid and imaginative guitar playing dominated the show. Vocalists Balla Sidibe and Rudy Gomis were in fine, playful form and saxophonists Thierno Koite and Issa Cissokho provided the sunny horn work – particularly effective in the 1950s doo-wop sound of Ndongo Daara.

As the dancing, both onstage and off, gathered momentum, the energy seemed unstoppable. But stop it did – after 70 minutes. Puzzled fans, finding themselves out on Ste. Catherine St. at 7:15 p.m., fumbled for their festival programs in search of outdoor shows. You might say the concert was tightly paced – to a fault.

BERNARD PERUSSE

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Jason Korsunsky was 24 when he took over as editor of Downbeat, the 70-year-old Chicago-based magazine that's synonymous with jazz around the world. In the four years since, he's visited the Montreal festival annually and revitalized the magazine to reflect the genre-busting changes in music. The personable, pony-tailed editor, who's played trumpet since he was a kid, elaborated: "If Downbeat, which started out as a trade magazine for swing musicians, hadn't changed with the times, we'd have never covered bebop."

Now advanced pop acts like Steely Dan and Elvis Costello seek out the magazine because they like to talk about the music, not gossip. "Musicians listen to everything, whether it's Femi Kuti or Sonny Rollins."

The Montreal festival, Korsky says, is "the best place to hear it all." So he graces us with a scoop: Wayne Shorter, who opened the fest, won awards in an unprecedented six categories for this year's Critics' Poll issue. The issue, always argument-provoking grist for the mill for jazzbos, is out later this month.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

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Elvis Costello could have led his audience off a cliff by the time he was through with them on Thursday night. His show at Salle Wilfrid Pelletier of Place des Arts featured a few rewarded crowd-pleasers – like a looser, Stones-ish Pump It Up and a jazzier Watching the Detectives – but the bulk of the 25-song set was made up of inspired selections for the Elvis connoisseur.

Few Costello albums were left unrepresented in a performance that included left-field gems like My Dark Life, Clown Strike, Clubland and I Hope You're Happy Now. Costello was in fine voice, singing entirely off mike in his country-ish ballad Still Too Soon to Know, and he connected with the appreciative audience. At one point, he led them through a sing-along of Smokey Robinson's You Really Got a Hold on Me, performed in a medley with Deep Dark Truthful Mirror.

The interplay between Costello and his band, the Imposters, bordered on telepathic – not surprising, since drummer Pete Thomas and keyboardist Steve Nieve have been with him since 1978. Bassist Davey Faragher fit in with ease, making the ensemble virtual Attractions. As always, Nieve was stunning, whether he was sweet-sexing All the Rage with country-ish fills or snapping at the bass's heels during the tricky Burt Bacharach collaborations Toledo and In the Darkest Place.

Standing ovations were too numerous to count – and just when you thought there was nowhere to go after a moving run through the anthemic rocker (What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding?, Costello dropped everything down to a whisper for a dramatic reading of the seething I Want You. After that, there really was nowhere to go.

BERNARD PERUSSE

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Modern piano pioneer Paul Bley, 70, responding to a reminder to attend a sound check before his concert with François Carrier: "I went. There's sound." And there's Bley-isms...

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

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What do serious musicians do in their off time at festivals? Study other musicians. At Kenny Werner's magisterial trio date at the Gesù on Thursday, young star Jason Moran sat quietly alone taking in the veteran's fireworks, joining the crowd in a standing ovation. The two pianist's trios are arguably the most dynamic in jazz at the moment.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

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Festival founders Alain Simard and André Ménard seem to be in a friendly battle for most original Hawaiian-style shirt, as they keep cool drifting through this year's hot-weather event. Ménard's shirt on Thursday raised the bar, imprinted with the scummy montage cover design of the Rolling Stones' classic Exile on Main Street. Which figures, because later this month Ménard will be in Prague on another of his Stones pilgrimages. The difference this time is that his Spectra-Scène is co-producing the show, expected to draw 110,000 paying customers.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

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The jazz festival is always a good place to get over your fear of labels and categories. Few people over 30 will sprint to the box office for a show with the words "techno" or "acid jazz" or "ambient" attached. But anyone who's read about legendary wee-hours psychedelic shows by the likes of Pink Floyd and the Soft Machine in the '60s might have caught a bit of that spirit at Club Soda after midnight on Thursday. With real bass, drums and percussion slamming away under the electronics, Ralph Myerz and the Jack Herren Band offered some ice-cool tunes and irresistible extended grooves. A blast.

BERNARD PERUSSE

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